1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-S (1907-1908) 1911
AXS Vedda AXS

they belonged, which suggested to us that perhaps they belonged to Uru *suraya* or one of the other clans which are considered of inferior status. Although the Arachi of Beligala did not know their *suraya* and believed that they had really forgotten them themselves, our opinion was confirmed by information obtained later from the Arachi of Alutnuwara who said that they were of the Uru and Namadewa *suraya*, while a Vedda of Horaborawewa told us that his mother came from Dambani and she was a Namadewa woman.

As the Arachi of Beligala assured us the Bulugahaladena Veddas lived in a condition precisely similar to those of Dambani, we did not visit their village but arranged for two of them to visit us at Beligala; they greeted us in the same way as the Dambani folk, with loud and guttural voices, accentuating all the "che," and shook hands. They brought some honey and yams. They said they could not bring *bambara* honey (for it was too early in the year) so they had brought honey from the stingless bee. After a little while they gradually dropped their guttural tones, especially when they were speaking to the villagers and not to us, their voices, naturally deep, assumed a sing-song tone not unlike that of Nila of Sitala Wanniya. We consider that the gruffness of these Veddas is almost entirely affectation. They have been expected to be sullen and morose and never to laugh. For thirty years the Arachi of Beligala has acted as "show-man" to the Veddas of his district, and he always speaks to them in their "language" in similar or even fiercer tones, and he has shown them so many white men that he has quite lost count of their number. He has thus helped to keep up the fiction of "wildness," for these Veddas are not wild since they are not shy but come up, shake hands, ask for presents, and offer to dance.

We believe that they keep up few, if any, of the old Vedda customs; they cultivate chenas and keep cattle, their bows and arrows are probably more for show than use, for the Arachi told us that some of them possess guns while others go to the Sinhalese and borrow them. Deschamps says that Veddas never laugh nor have they ever been seen to smile. Of course this is not true of the Veddas of Nilgala, nor do we think it is true of

1:Seligmann & Seligmann E-S (1907-1908) 1911
AX5 Vedda AX5

these village Veddas, though they seem to be of a somewhat morose disposition. He also said they take no interest in things unknown to them. However, the phonograph attracted as much attention and interest as it always had from Veddas and Sinhalese alike, and we distinctly saw one Vedda smile when his song was reproduced. 157

The chena settlement at Wallampelle was seen, but here it appeared that much intermarriage had taken place with the Sinhalese. 144

Malgode. There are a number of people very mixed blooded, but calling themselves Veddas, living at Malgode on the shores of Horaborawewa, a beautiful tank traditionally associated with the Veddas. They have dropped their old Vedda customs so entirely that the local Sinhalese no longer look upon them as true village Veddas, an attitude that has perhaps been fostered by the fact that here in Uva where the Veddas are exempt from all taxation these people pay road tax. Such at least was the point of view of the Arachi of Alutnuwara, "how can these people be Veddas?—they pay road tax." In spite of this there is no doubt that they are largely of Vedda descent and in many instances remember their *sarraga*. They live in very poorly built houses and depend largely on the seeds of the lotus for food. They still pose as pure-blooded Veddas to white visitors, and have been recently described by Drs H. M. Hillier and W. H. Furness, 3rd. "We followed the jungle path along the eastern shore of the lake, sometimes over outcrops of granite, or down by the lake side...and after following our guide through thick undergrowth for half-an-hour, suddenly, and without warning, we came out into a cleared space, where there was the merest excuse for a hut, and beside it a man and woman squatting side by side and cooking something in a blackened earthen pot, which rested on a fire of twigs and branches; a little beyond them were more huts and more women and children—lo! the Village Veddahs. The elderly man and woman whom we first saw had between them scarcely a yard of coarse cloth as clothing, their hair hung loose in dishevelled twists and strings about their faces, and they both squatted so low that their knees stood up above their shoulders. But the most impressive thing about 144 177 361 [651] 511

2;Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

follows, that, till I measured him, I believed him to be not merely comparatively a tall man, was only five feet three inches in height. He was a Veddah of Bintenne, and much more civilised in his life than the rest of the wild tribes there. The shortest man I have measured was four feet one inch. I should say that of men, the ordinary height is from four feet six to five feet one inch, and of women from four feet four to four feet eight inches.*

Their features are tolerably regular. The eyes are good, and often full. The nose is generally well shaped, though inclining to be flat; the nostrils wide. The mouth sometimes large, and the lips firm, but rather thick. The beard is short and scant. The hair of the head which is not curly falls in rusty, tangled masses about the face, making the head appear out of all proportion to the lean body, and this leads those who are not close observers to describe the Veddahs as large-headed. Tennent notices this and remarks how perfectly the description of the Beseda, in the tract *De moribus Brachmanorum*, applies to the Veddahs of the present day. "Pigmies" indeed they are, "stunted and with unshorn dishevelled locks"—but the term *μεγαλακέφαλα* is not appropriate to them; for in point of fact, their heads are remarkably small.† One of their skulls, sent to England by me some years ago, through my friend Mr. Thwaites, the able Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens of Ceylon, to be submitted to the Society, was pronounced to be, in general capacity, smaller than the smallest negro, native Australian, or Esquimaux.‡ But their wild shaggy hair gives such an appearance of undue size to the head that it might well mislead the travellers from Thebes in the fifth and Tennent in the nineteenth century.

When quite in repose, the features of the Veddahs wear a vacant and melancholy expression, which is almost painful to look upon. In speaking to them, I have observed, in some, considerable shrewd-

* In a list of heights of Veddahs taken lately at my request, I find two Veddahs measuring five feet three inches, and one five feet three inches and four-tenths; but, if these measurements are perfectly accurate, this is much above the average height. Of fourteen Veddahs of Bintenne, lately measured for me, the tallest was five feet three inches and four-tenths, the shortest four feet six inches and a quarter; the average five feet and half an inch. Of twelve women, the tallest was five feet two inches and a half, the shortest four feet four inches and a half; the average four feet nine inches.

† *Vide* the whole passage quoted by Tennent, vol. ii, part ix, chap. iii, note at page 439, 2nd edition, but especially the following: "*εἰσὶ δὲ καὶ οἱ Βανδῖται ἀνδρώδεις, σκληροὶ, μεγαλακέφαλοι, ἄκαρνες, καὶ ἀγελότριχες.*"

‡ It was considered to be that of a female between twenty-two and twenty-eight years of age. The skull came from Milgala, and was the smallest skull ever measured by Mr. Busk.

2: Bailey G-5 (ca. 1854) 1863
AX5 Vedda AX5

ness; in others, that perplexed manner common in people of weak intellect. The women appear sharper and quicker than the men, unless it be that they have less *mauvais honte*, and acquit themselves better before company, but they are the most ordinary specimens of the sex I ever saw.*

The Veddahs bear a very striking resemblance to each other—both in feature and expression. And this is especially remarkable among those of Nilgala, who have preserved their ancient customs more completely than their brethren of Bintenne, who live in a less secluded country, have been able to do.

Their clothing—so to speak—is the most scanty conceivable. A scrap of dirty cloth, scarcely larger than the paper on which I write, supported in front by a string round the waist, being a complete Veddah suit for male or female; for the rag that does duty for crinoline, is scarcely less diminutive than that which represents the male garments.† Indeed, almost the only difference in the costume of the men and women is, that the latter have their ears pierced, and wear in the lobes round studs of ivory.

Neither sex is remarkable for personal cleanliness, and with their rugged unkempt locks half obscuring their features, the Veddahs certainly realize all one's preconceived notions of the most barbarous savages.

Knox's picture of "a Vadda, or Wild Man" is a fancy portrait, and decidedly flattering. They do not "tye their hair on their crowns in a bunch", nor do they indulge in nearly so much drapery or beard as is worn by that stout well-to-do-looking gentleman, who is placidly smoking an imaginary pipe, for smoking is a luxury at which the Veddahs have not yet arrived. The contrast between Knox's idea of the wild men, and their actual appearance, is amusing.

When brought in from their forests to be "looked at," they huddle themselves together like a herd of wild and timid animals driven into a corner from which there is no escape. Attract their attention by a present of rice or cloth, and in an instant they become like eager children, scrambling for a new toy,—forget the presence of strangers, and intent only on what is before them, jostle each other, clamouring for a fair division of the spoil, and complaining loudly against those of their companions whom they suspect of having got more than their share of the good things.

But it is not fair to judge of them when so utterly out of their

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* I saw some of them display the liveliest curiosity at the sight of their "white sisters", two remarkably good specimens of whom found their way to Nilgala in 1857.

† Formerly the sacking-like bark of the "Riti tree" (*antiaris innoxia*, or *A. saccadora*) supplied the place of cloth; and bags made of this fibrous bark are still used by the Singhalese for carrying rice, etc.

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

Vela was an interesting little chap and, unlike the others, had always something to say for himself. He entertained us with charms, pleasing lullabies, and songs of rock and stream demons that came as fast as *na* leaves shaken by the wind, in the guise of bears, their mouths adrip with human blood. These he sang despite warnings from the others who reminded him that he had sucked a chicken bone, which was a dangerous thing to do before invoking devils lest it invite their anger.

Coming to a pool, brown with decaying leaves, we asked if the water was good. "Very good," said a Vedda, adding the epicurean touch, "Those fallen flowers floating there make the water sweet; they are the flowers that give good honey."

It was high noon when Veddas left us to go in search of food. But Vela lingered to tell us of the oppression of the local headman. Did they but catch a young deer or pea-chick that came their way they were prosecuted. The visiting apothecary too was bad; he gave them no medicines except for gifts of honey or meat; and the poor fellows had little enough for themselves.

Having visited a cave containing the battered remains of an old Buddha, we continued our circuit of the rock; and after a walk of an hour and a half under a burning sky, came to the Veddas of the *Kudda Ulpotha*. These had no huts of any sort, but merely sat grouped in families under various trees. It was the season of the *kong* fruit, of which there was plenty about. Women were boiling down the luscious pulp with which to make cakes, or extracting from the seeds an oil said to be good for sores and wounds. Very fond of the fruit they all were; it had been their only sustenance for days. One little urchin, his mouth be-ringed with parangi ulcers, was licking clean a coconut shell containing the acrid juice, with a relish worthy of a tastier dish.

The patriarch of the settlement, Naida, and his wife were typical Veddas; but here again most of the others showed Tamil admixture. One man had a large scar across his face. The manner he came by it illustrates well the aggressiveness of the little Ceylon sloth-bear. When out collecting honey he saw a she-bear and her cub. Realizing the certain disaster of such an encounter he cautiously climbed a tree; but in doing so snapped a twig and gave himself away. With a series of blood-curdling cries she charged him, and clambering up the tree, bit and clawed him severely. A large flap was torn from his face. This his father sewed up with a thorn and fibre, and doctored with a result that might have done credit to any surgeon. Living as they invariably do in the neighbourhood of rocks, and having kindred tastes in honey, yams, and fruit, the Veddas and bears often encounter each other, as the ugly scars on many of the men testify.

As, footsore and tired, we rounded the southern end of the rock towards evening, we met parties of Veddas returning with basketfuls of *kong* fruit. One youth was up a tree making the jungle ring to his song as he beat down the berries. As it darkened we reached Manampitiya, but not before we had worried a blind old owl that had descended to a streamlet to quench its thirst.

It is hard to forget that first experience of the Veddas in their homes: those voices in the jungle, that sight of their huts among the trees, and of their women roasting dainty little flowers for food.

5: Spittel B-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

2. FOREST CHILDREN

621 The village of Potuliyadda lies in the heart of the country of the Henebedde Veddas. We had hoped to take these people unawares in their homes some three miles away; but it was not to be; for a Vedda boy who had witnessed our arrival had forestalled us.

We were at lunch, when my friend, whose seat commanded a view of the jungle, quietly remarked, "Hullo; who are these? Veddas without a doubt."

142 Five men, armed with bows, arrows and axes, strode in single file
157 under the leadership of a small one-eyed man, half of whose face was
[411] covered by an awful scar which puckered an eyeless socket, giving a
[622] touch of pathos to an otherwise harsh expression. Such was Poromola, chief of the Henebedde Veddas also called *Walaha* (bear) for obvious reasons. Then there was Handuna a fine type of wild man; though close on fifty his figure was well-knit, and this combined with his goatee beard and tousy head gave a strength and rugged dignity to his bearing. There were also a tall bearded man of forty, loquacious and sophisticated enough when you knew him; a lanky, slouching, beady-eyed fellow; a robust, curly-haired bumpkin; and lastly, the snub-nosed little mischief-maker to whom we owed the honour of this visit.

123 As the Veddas came up to us, they uttered some fierce jargon we did not understand. It was pretty obvious they were acting; and not caring to encourage them in this, I casually motioned them away. They retired mumbling. We recalled them later to find them in dudgeon, evidently not being used to such treatment. They stared mutely at us affecting not to understand a word of the Sinhalese in which I addressed them. I tried again and again, but not by the flicker of an eyelid did they signify comprehension. Civility and persuasion having failed, I tried the effect of candour, telling them that we were not gullible strangers and knew all about them. This also was without effect.

Opening Seligmann's book, which contained the portraits of these very Veddas taken ten years previously, we suited picture to prototype. They gazed uncritically with stolid intentness showing no surprise or enthusiasm. I asked them whether they remembered the author and his wife who had spent so much time with them and been so kind to them. One nodded, and the others' faces betrayed interest. Thus was the first barrier carried.

Gradually we won them over one by one; but despite our best efforts the conversation flagged. And we, tired of making all the advances simulated an indifference we far from felt, and took to our books.

"We are hungry," said Handuna after a while. "Will you not give us food?"

We could only offer them money, an almost useless thing to the Vedda. We had made the serious mistake of coming unprovided with a surplus of rice, betel, arecanut and tobacco; for the surest way to the heart of the Vedda is through his stomach. We

3. THE MARAWEETHIYA

Far or forgot to me is near,
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear
And one to me are shame and fame.

EMERSON

13 FROM Yakkure to Horiwila is six miles. The first part of the journey is through marsh; here the Mahaweli make a bend which all but encroaches on the path. The place is rank with vegetation. Tall grass thrives amidst sombre trees that stand apart, clothed out of all recognition in stoles of trailing mycania. The air is humid and oppressively still. One is glad to be rid of the swampy luxuriance with its strong suggestion of malaria.

Beyond a pleasant stretch of paddy, closer than we had ever seen it before, stood Gunner's Quoin. Tinkling cow-bells and the mournful cries of peafowl welcomed us to Horiwila.

361 144 The racial types we have passed, will repay review. Omuna, Dolagalwella and Kalukolu Eba were shifting *chena* settlements inhabited by Veddas with a large proportion of Sinhalese blood. Yakkure was a permanent village with the *chenas* apart; here the people called themselve Veddas but showed strong Tamil traits. The folk of Horiwila were not sure whether to call themselves Tamils or Veddas; while Manampitiya, beyond Horiwila, was a purely Tamil village. So does propinquity shape the type of Vedda, and forest penetration by the Sinhalese on the one hand and Tamils on the other, tend to obliterate the aboriginal race.

000 Decoyed by its beauty, we camped on a rock on the bund of the Horiwila tank, soon to learn that a stone exposed all day to the sun, was not the most desirable of camping places even at night. The stored heat radiating from the rock kept us awake till morning, and we rose quite unrefreshed for the good day's work before us, for to-day we would climb the Quoin, which, ever since we saw it across the marsh at Yakkure, beckoned us on. The Tamils of the place could only take us to the base 115 of the hill; from there a Vedda of the Ulpotta must guide us. It was quite an hour before we found him. I recognised him at once as Sinna an old friend; there were the bunions on his shoulder from carrying loads of lizards and yams, and there the hooked finger caused by a snake-bite [N2 15?] when plucking a *kanava* comb from a creviced tree. A dwarf, with frizzly upstanding hair and wild eyes, and shy almost to timidity, Sinna had nothing of the sophisticated Vedda about him. He lived alone with [166] his small family at the end of the rock. The rest of his people had left when the *kurrukkan* crop failed: but Sinna remained to gather a precarious living from the scanty pickings of the field. We came on him searching for food in the forest.

The poor fellow was in great distress that morning, his favourite dog having been taken by a leopard the previous night. Hearing the animal's

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

triangle bounded on the south by the Gal Oya: on the west by the Bibile-Batticaloa road; and on the east by the coast road. Within this space are found the Veddas of Danigala, Henebedda and Bingoda, besides the few about Kotelinda, Divulana and Serangamadu. If to this tract were added that to the west and north of the Bibile-Batticaloa road, between it and the Mahaweli-ganga, we shall have embraced the Veddas of Bintenne, Gunner's Quoin, and other scattered settlements, and accounted for every Vedda extant—a mere handful of people in all.

Kaurala of Kotelinda was the first Vedda worthy of the name we had encountered on this long journey. He was a Bingoda Vedda of the Morana *warige*, but had spent most of his days at Bandaradua now derelict. He lived with his family in a crude hut in the jungle; his sole weapons were an axe, a bow and arrows. He was a simple soul, laughing uproariously at one moment, and the next assuming that troubled gravity so characteristic of his race. He knew every inch of his jungles; there was no tree, stream, or stone once passed which he could not instantly recognise again. This instinct and the sun were his sole means of orientation. We tried to press him into service, but he refused. "How can I come?" he said, tossing head and arms like a windmill. "I am a lone man. I live in the jungle. I am only a Vedda. If I go, who is there to look after my children? See here, now," pointing to the damaged trees about his hut; "this is what the *kotukandas** have done. How can I come?"

Our deviation to Kotelinda was in vain. We had hoped to cut across the hills of Madana to Galmede; but the path had long been absorbed into the forest. We had therefore to double back to Bokkebedda, and thence strike north, through Gonagalla, to Divulana. With our usual ill-luck on this trip, we caught our fifth thunderstorm. It dropped plumb on us and worried us all the way; while in the unscathed beyond, over the treed parkland, the sunset wrought a panorama of opal and pearl, touching to glory the austere peak of Friar's Hood, queen of the distant hills.

*Elephants.

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

interfusion of Vedda blood—the apathetic look, the scanty beard, were unmistakably there. The area we had to traverse was not extensive, hemmed in, as it was, by the Bibile-Maha Oya road on the one hand and Mahaweli on the other. It is five miles from Alutnuwara to Arawatta; six miles from that to the Ulhitiya Oya; thence seven to Beligalla which is within four to six miles of Bulugahadena and Dambana, the Vedda haunts of to-day. The going is through forest comparatively well peopled; and *chenas* are frequently met with; changing from year to year, these often absorb the path and obliterate it, causing deviations which lead astray even guides conversant with the country a few months previously.

We were nearing Bulugahadena when we met our first Vedda of these parts—a tall, picturesque fellow with ear-rings, shouldering his bow stave with a small gourdful of honey slung on its end. Unspoilt, reserved and natural, in contrast to his fellows whom we afterwards met, he was the finest Vedda we saw in Bintenne.

In an environment, not of virgin forest, but of derelict *chenas* we found the Veddas of Bulugahadena. They lived scattered about, a hut or two to each *chena*, and not in groups as one so often sees; the explanation we were given for this was not the obvious one that *chenas* were apparently easier of acquisition here than elsewhere, but that it served to keep the families apart and prevent social entanglements, Veddas being very jealous of their women.

There was no reserve about these people. As we approached each hut, the men, armed with axes, bows and arrows, came out and greeted us vociferously in the Vedda language; Sinhalese they affected not to know. Their women were mostly sullen and silent; but one at least gave us a better reception than her husband did. Here and there a sickly wretch craved for medicine.

Their huts, made of bark slats and wattle, were too well built for Vedda habitations; they had not that crudity and unkemptness so characteristic of the huts of the wilder Veddas, and most of them were finished off with a neat fence-work. There was no lack of *kurrukkan* and maize here; and on the whole they seemed a fairly prosperous and contented community.

The Veddas of Dambana, who lived four miles away, were much the same as those of Bulugahadena; and so were the others we met scattered about these jungles. One lot we found picturesquely grouped in a rock-shelter, reproducing to perfection the old cave life; but they were obviously there for our benefit!

Of these Veddas, considered as a whole, we may say that we had never before seen so many of them as on this short trip of barely a week. On previous journeys, after having traversed miles and miles of jungle, we had met only a Vedda here and a Vedda there, never more than a dozen in all, often but one or two. But in Bintenne we saw no less than about fifty good specimens. Though they were obviously sophisticated by their nearness to Badulla and the many occasions on which their representatives had been on show, Vedda blood is still strong in Bintenne. This is the place to come to if one wishes to pick up the few words that are left of the Vedda language, and the art of making bows and arrows; but apart from that, these people are too civilised to be interesting.

One episode we experienced here is worth recalling. Two Veddas, better disposed towards us than the rest, one with his lip all askew from